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AUTHOR Rosenboom, Lizette
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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of a study on the quality of attachment in two groups of interracially adopted infants in the Netherlands, and compares these results with results from a similar study of American interracial adoption. The two groups in the Netherlands consisted of 30 adoptive Asian children placed in White families, and 20 Asian and Latin American children who were the first adopted child in White families with biological children. The American sample consisted of 19 adopted Asian or Latin American children placed in White families, and a control group of 27 firstborn nonadopted infants. Quality of attachment was assessed using the Strange Situation procedure when the children were between 13 and 18 months in the American samples, and at 12 and 18 months in the Dutch samples. Children were classified as anxious avoidant, secure, or anxious ambivalent. Analysis and comparison revealed no significant difference in quality of attachment between the Dutch interracially adopted infants and the nonadopted American infants. No significant difference in quality of attachment between the adopted infants in families with an adopted infant only and infants in families that also had biological children was found for the Dutch samples. In the American sample only 42 percent of the adopted children were securely attached, compared to 74 percent of the nonadopted children. No significant differences in attachment security between adopted and nonadopted infants in the Dutch sample were found. (MM)

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PATTERNS OF ATTACHMENT OF INTERRACIAL ADOPTED CHILDREN IN A DUTCH SAMPLE COMPARED TO AN AMERICAN SAMPLE

Lizette Rosenboom
Adoption Centre
Utrecht University
Heidelberglaan 1
3584 CS Utrecht
the Netherlands

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PATTERNS OF ATTACHMENT IN A DUTCH SAMPLE OF INTERRACIAL ADOPTED CHILDREN COMPARED TO AN AMERICAN SAMPLE

Lizette Rosenboom
Utrecht University

SUMMARY. In the Netherlands we collected data on the quality of attachment in two groups of interracial adopted infants. One group consists of 30 first children placed in white families (15 girls and 15 boys), the other group consists of 20 children who are the first adopted child in white families with biological children (9 girls and 11 boys). The children are all adopted before the age of six months from Asia or Latin America.
In contrast to our expectations, based on research findings on attachment in an American sample (Singer et al.; 1985), we did not find a higher rate of insecure attachments among the adopted children, than found in a sample of nonadopted infants. Nor did we in the Dutch sample find any differences in the quality of attachment between the adoptive only children and the children in mixed families.

I would like to introduce you to adoption in the Netherlands: on a population of just over 15 million people, there are around 43,000 adoptees. Almost half of the adopted children come from abroad, most often from Asia and Latin-America. Currently, every year about 1000 children are adopted, of which only about 50 are local adoptions. By far the majority are foreign, mostly interracial, adoptions (Hoksbergen, 1992; Hoksbergen et al., 1986, 1987).

In a Dutch sample of interracial adopted children, partly replicating an American attachment study, our findings were quite different than in the American sample.

Attachment is considered a key characteristic in child psychology. A secure attachment relationship with the mother, with whom we mean the main caretaker, is the basis for trust in other people and for a good development (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1991). In the case of adoption, the building of the first attachment relationship with a mother figure is postponed. Furthermore, high expectations of the adoptive parents concerning the child, or temperamental differences between parents and child might influence the quality of the attachment relationship to be (Brodzinsky & Schechter; 1990).

Singer (1983) and Steir (1983) each did research in American samples,

on the quality of attachment in adoptive families as compared to nonadoptive families. Their studies involved nonadopted infants, who served as a control group, and intraracial adopted infants, as well as interracial adopted infants. As in the Netherlands, adoption in virtually all cases means foreign, interracial adoption, we will focus on the American results concerning interracial adoption only. The results of the studies of Singer and Steir indicated that interracial adoption might be a risk concerning the quality of attachment between mother and adoptive child (Singer et al., 1985). They found that 58% of the interracial adoptees were anxiously attached, compared to 26% of the nonadopted infants (figure 1). This is a statistically significant difference.

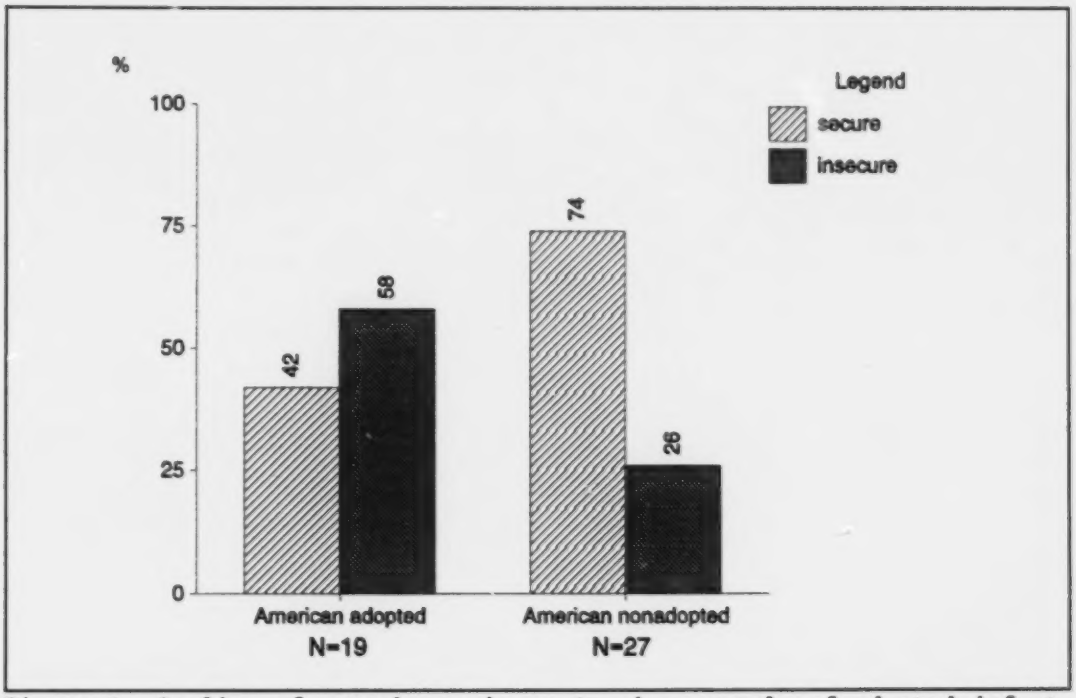

Figure 1. *Quality of attachment in an American sample of adopted infants compared to nonadopted infants*

It appears that the presence of biological children in adoptive families is another riskfactor, as seen in recent Dutch research and our consultancy practice. I will refer to these families, families with

adoptive as well as biological children, as mixed families. In our clinical practice with adoptive families, 58% of the families are mixed families, while in the Dutch population of adoptive families only 25% consists of mixed families. This experience is confirmed by a study on problematic adoptive placements that result in the disruption of the adoption, mainly in adolescence, and the placement of the children in institutions. 64% of the disruptions appeared in mixed families. One of the problems often refered to in these families is that the children have relationproblems with their parents.

Based on the two findings: the relatively high amount of insecurely attached infants in adoptive families in an American sample, and the relatively high incidence of severe relationproblems in mixed families in the Netherlands, we formulated two questions:

1. Will we, like reported by Singer and her colleagues, find a higher rate of insecurely attached infants in a Dutch population of interracial adopted children, than in a population of nonadopted children?
2. Will we find a higher incidence of insecurely attached infants amongst interracial adoptees in mixed families, than amongst interracial adoptees who are the first child in the family?

In the Netherlands we collected data between 1985 and 1992, on the quality of attachment in a longitudinal study of interracial adopted children. The data are part of an extensive intervention study, but to give a complete review of the project, is beyond the scope of this presentation. Tomorrow my colleague Femmie Juffer will, in a posterpresentation, present some of the results of the intervention study. Here, I will focus on the results of the attachment study in comparison to the American sample, and present the data concerning our control groups only.

We collected data on attachment in two groups. Sample one consists of 30 only adoptive children placed in white families: 15 girls and 15 boys from Asia. Sample two consists of 20 children who are the first adopted child in white families with biological children: 9 girls and 11 boys from Asia and Latin America. The American sample consists of 19 only adopted children of Oriental or Latin American Indian origins placed in white families: 14 girls and 5 boys. The American control group consists of 27 firstborn nonadopted infants: 12 girls and 15 boys. All children are observed with their primary caretaker, in all cases their mother.

Table 1. *Samples we used in our comparisons*

Sample	N	girls/boys
Dutch adopted* only child	30	15/15
Dutch adopted* in mixed family	20	9/11
American adopted* only child	19	14/ 5
American nonadopted	27	12/15

* All adopted children are interracial adopted

In both Dutch groups the children were placed with their adoptive family before the age of 6 months. In the American adoption sample all but two children were placed before the age of 6 months.

Quality of attachment is assessed using the Strange Situation procedure of Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al., 1978). In the American sample the Strange Situation is assessed when the children were between 13 and 18 months of age. In the Dutch sample we assessed the Strange Situation procedure twice; when the children were 12 months and when the children were 18 months of age.

On the basis of video recordings of the Strange Situation behavior, infants are assigned to one of three attachment groups: A-children are anxious avoidant; B-children are secure; and C-children are anxious ambivalent. As all samples are quite small, and because we did not have any specific expectations concerning the type of insecure relationships adoptive children might build, we only report on the dichotomy secure -that is the B-children- versus insecure -the avoidant and ambivalent children together.

As we said before, our findings were quite different than the American findings:

1. We did not find any significant difference between the Dutch interracial adopted infants and the nonadopted American control group in terms of attachment.
2. Neither did we find any significant difference in quality of attachment between the only adopted infants and the adopted infants in mixed families in the Dutch samples.

This answers both questions we formulated.

We did however find significant differences in the quality of attachment, between both Dutch samples of interracial adopted infants on the one hand, and the American interracial adopted infants on the other hand.

We saw that in the American sample only 42% of the adopted children were securely attached, compared to 74% of the nonadopted children. In the Dutch samples this was 70 and 80% respectively at 12 months (figure 2), and 73 and 75% respectively at 18 months (figure 3). All differences with the American adoption sample are significant. No significant difference between the Dutch adoption samples and the nonadopted control group exist.

Starting from these findings interracial adopted children in the United States seem to be at a greater risk concerning attachment than the

children in our Dutch samples. How can we explain this difference? One explanation might be that interracial adoption in the Netherlands is more accepted than in the United States. From the American literature on adoption it appears that interracial adoption is a touchy subject; Americans view the adoption of a child from a different cultural background apprehensively and sometimes even negatively (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Ladner, 1977). In the Netherlands this is probably not the case.

Another difference might be that interracial adoption in the Netherlands concerns intercountry adoption, while in America it can also concern domestic interracial adoption. It may appear a lot more difficult to accept your racially different child as yours when the biological parents might live around the corner in quite different socio-economic situations, than when they live at the other end of the world (Humphrey & Humphrey, 1993).

The explanation the researchers themselves give for the difference in quality of attachment between interracial and intraracial adoptees, is that it may be more difficult to get used to interaction with a child that is of clearly different appearance, than with a child that ethnically looks like you. They assume it is all a matter of time (Singer et al., 1985). The Dutch findings don't support this explanation, however. We did not find any risk in the quality of attachment at all, not at 12 months nor at 18 months.

Based on our results we may conclude in the first place that in the Netherlands interracial adoption is no risk for the formation of secure attachment relationships.

And second: problems that might arise in adolescence in mixed families can't be explained on the basis of the quality of attachment in infancy. To investigate what factors might be of importance we will continue our longitudinal study on these children in their early schoolyears.

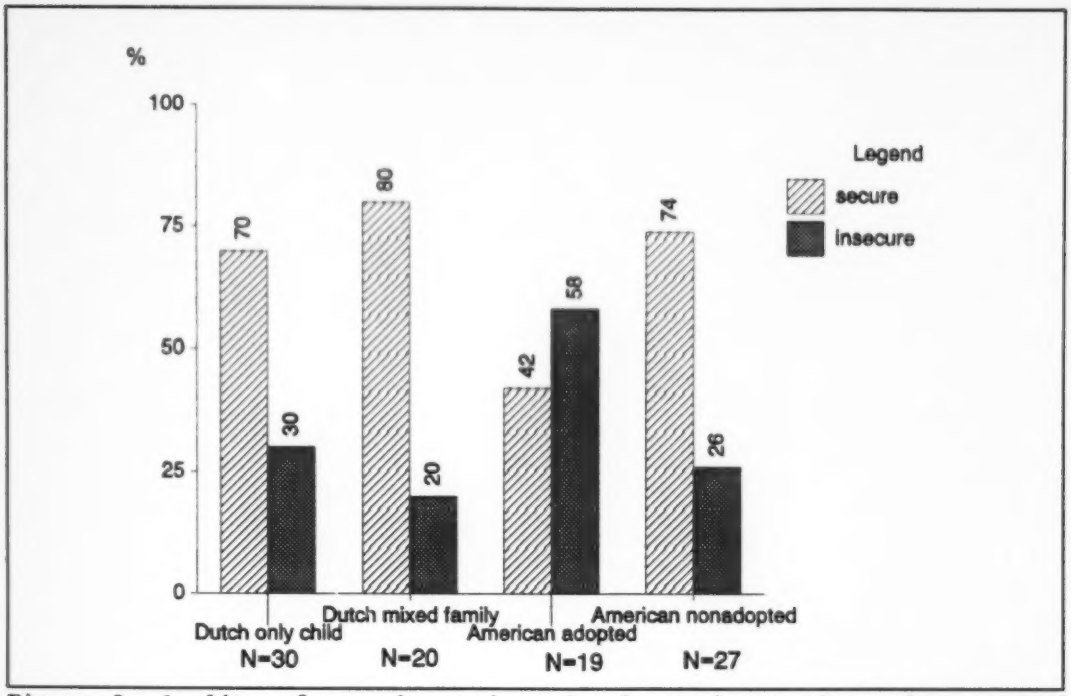

Figure 2. *Quality of attachment in a Dutch sample at 12 months compared to an American sample*

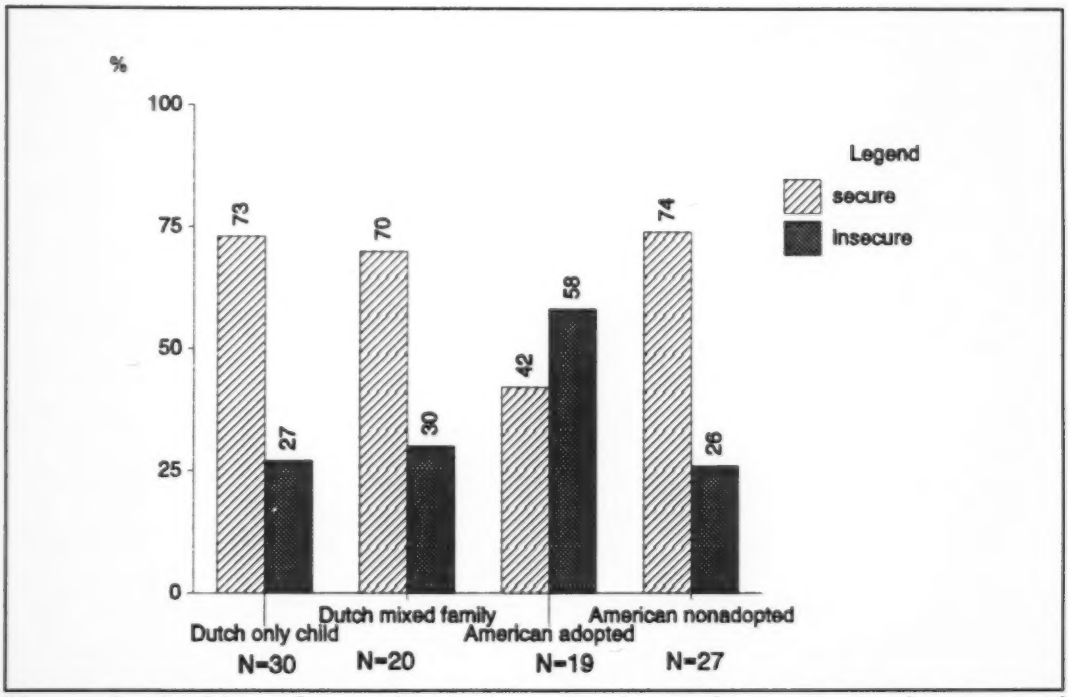

Figure 3. *Quality of attachment in a Dutch sample at 18 months compared to an American sample*

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